

THE SPY WHO NEVER WAS — PART I

How Nightmare 'Spy' Career Began at Concert for Russians

EDITOR'S NOTE: — On March 26, an American girl was released from 37 months in East German and Russian jails—and this emerged from an adventure more fantastic than any episode in Fleming's ever dreamed up for his James Bond spy novels. Following is the first article in a series Miss Hammerstein has written which, exclusively and for the first time, discloses the unique way in which she got involved with the Communist secret police, and the amazing experiences this involvement led to. Miss Hammerstein is now recuperating from her ordeal in Queens, New York, where she lives with her mother, before resuming her singing career. Her story has been substantiated from a variety of sources.

By **GABRIELE HAMMERSTEIN** (as told to Peter Hahn)

NEW YORK (NANA)—I have just served 37 months in East German and Russian jails, paid a six-year sentence for "espionage," meted out to me in secret trial behind the Iron Curtain by the masters of Europe's Red domain.

What follows is the true story—an amazing one—of how and why I was arrested, tried, and convicted of "heinous crimes."

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against socialist society. Of incredible involvement with international espionage network of my "mock marriage" in Moscow, of my meetings in prison with American and other victims of the Red police terror.

The story may sound improbable to some. And maybe I'm an "improbable" kind of person. This may be the reason why I got into such a tangle at the hands of Communist agents.

It is, in fact, a tragicomic story—errors—and all my troubles began because I wanted to stay out of trouble!

The whole thing started on September 1, 1960, when I arrived in West Berlin, where I intended to live while singing for the famous Staatsoper (state opera house) in the Soviet sector.

I had no qualms about singing for the East Berlin opera. There were a number of well-known and loyal Americans working at the Komische Oper (comic opera theater) in the same part of the city. What's more, I'm a Wagnerian soprano, and the singing of my career—an espionage—meant out to me in secret trial behind the Iron Curtain by the masters of Europe's Red domain.

THE REDS CONTACT ME

Rehearsals, I learned upon arrival, were delayed for a few days because the opera's musical director was ill. I was arranging the furniture of my apartment in Halensee, a pleasant suburb in the British sector.

I MEET CIA MAN

The next day, I stopped in at the U.S. Consulate, where I had made regular visits during my stay in Berlin a few months earlier. Mr. Burke, the consul, had become a kind of fatherly advisor to me during that time. I told him that I was back in town and would start singing at the Staatsoper soon. During our conversation, I mentioned that I had been asked to sing at the embassy, and that I had eagerly accepted the offer. Burke was far from pleased.

"Hold it, Gabi," he said. "There's something wrong here!" He explained that no other American had ever been asked to perform at such a diplomatic event, and that he would like to talk to somebody else about this man.

He called in another man who identified himself as Robert Bennett, of the U.S. Commandant's Public Safety Division. (I later learned that Bennett worked for the CIA, even though he himself never told me so.) Bennett, a handsome, dark-haired man, listened to my story, and then told me: "You know you met, what they talked to you about, and whatever

A heavily accented voice said: "Miss Hammerstein, you mentioned the last time we met that I should stop by for coffee, but if I didn't, 'I'd be better off away from Berlin, home in England.'"

I remembered the caller immediately. It was the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin. I had met him while negotiating my contract with the Staatsoper during a previous visit. I had insisted on dealing with a Russian rather than an East German, because the United States doesn't recognize the Communist puppet regime. And I recalled that I had casually asked him to give me a ring if he should ever come to my part of town.

Waulen explained that he was with a colleague "who works in my office. Could he bring him along?" He was a pleasant enough man, and there was fresh coffee in the percolator. So I asked them to come over.

Before long they arrived. Waulen carrying a huge bouquet of flowers. He introduced his friend as Alexey Rakov, Alysha for short. Both of them liked American coffee and proved to be amusing conversationalists, well versed in music and other cultural fields. We had a pleasant visit. Just before leaving, Alysha said, "I'm organizing a soiree for our embassy. Would you like to sing a few songs for us? It might be good for your career, because some important music critics will be there."

I felt flattered by his request, and gladly accepted. Surely, there could be nothing wrong with performing before a diplomatic audience. The performance was to be a few weeks hence. Since I wasn't familiar with East Berlin streets, Rakov asked me to meet him at the opera house.

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and appear at this party. Then he hinted that doing so would be very important for me, and that if I didn't, "I'd be better off away from Berlin, home in England." I assumed we would

engagement at the embassy. I drove my white Chrysler Imperial to the Staatsoper. Rakov was waiting for me. He told me that he had assumed we would

When the performance was over, I was taken to another building inside the compound. A private party had been arranged there by Mr. Mogzyin, one of the officers I had met before. I went on stage. The vodka flowed freely, and I was beginning to feel giddy, even though I tried to counteract the effect of alcohol by eating big spoonfuls of caviar. Mogzyin spoke excellent English. Through him, I met another officer, whose name was Major Nicola—"Kolya"—Polyakov. Kolya took one look at me and said, "I love you!"

He paid him no attention, but he was to be an important participant in the dramatic events which led to my arrest more than a year later.

After the party, Rakov and Mogzyin drove me back to my apartment. Rakov apologized for his "little deception" in not telling me where the party was to be held. He and Mogzyin asked me not to mention where I had been.

TAKEN TO SOVIET LAIR

During the week that followed, Rakov met me in East Berlin and handed me a sheaf of Russian music, containing songs like "Moscow Nights," "Strelka Razin." He took me to a restaurant, and we promptly got into a heated argument over Fidel Castro. "America always wanted to treat Cuba as a colony," he said. "It's the same with you and East Germany," he replied.

He talked to me in German, which is my native language. My parents, both physicians, fled Germany from the Nazis in 1933, taking my brother, sister and me to the United States. As our dinner neared its end, he did agree, though, that Russia is a nice thing to have. I would for me to park my car. On the evening of my singing

and colonels. But there was no sign of any Germans being present, especially not the music critics I had been led to expect. I later learned that Germans, even high Communist intelligence officials are only rarely allowed to enter the Soviet

We were offered some refreshments. Then Rakov pointed to the stage, which held a grand piano. A huge portrait of Lenin, framed by flags, served as backdrop. When I climbed the few steps to the stage, the accompanist, also Russian, smiled at me encouragingly, and we were off.

My singing was very well received. After the Russian numbers, I was asked to sing American melodies, such as "Kiss of Fire," and "Begin the Beguine." This last song I was asked to encore five times.

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PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP

In the weeks that followed, Rakov called me several times. I was invited — and went to — several other parties at Karlshorst. My contacts with the Russians continued under the guidance of Bennett. In dealing with Rakov and his friends, every thing was "very friendly," peace and friendship. But slowly I noticed that their interest were weering away from strictly cultural pursuits. Rakov asked me for "a list of my friends among the Americans in West Berlin." I gave him one, after getting the nod from Bennett. The list was not short in my estimation, so I added a few phony names. Bennett didn't like this idea, said, "It gives them phony information, they're going to check you out and you're dead!"

But the Russians gobbled it up, just like a "short travel report," requested by Rakov or a

weekend trip I had taken to West Germany. In this, I had included an imaginary "column" of U.S. tanks, which hindered my progress near the Zonal border. I rather liked the idea of weakening the Russians' nerve.

Meanwhile, I continued working on my roles for the Staatsoper. A few days later, I got a call from Rakov, who told me that he had an "influential friend" who wanted to meet me. He was so intimate that this man had picked Van Cliburn for the Moscow recital, and that he could do the same for me.

MY SPYMASTER

On a Tuesday in December, Rakov took me to Karlshorst and introduced me to Scandinavian-looking man with balding reddish-blond hair, and gave him the name of Evgeny Khedrov. (I later learned that Khedrov's real name is Colonel Evgeny Alexeyevich Zastrovskiy of the Soviet Secret Police—KGB.)

Khedrov called me "a good American," and said he would like to help me as he had helped Cliburn. He described himself as a "political officer with cultural interests," and added that he could set up recitals at Dresden and Leipzig for me. From the way he talked, it was obvious to me that his offer was a "home-made" espionage net, which extended only in my imagination, and solely on "home-made" secret data, that sent one of the most powerful intelligence agencies in the world scurrying through the four corners of the empire, looking for spies who ever existed.

EXT: I STARTED PLAYING THE GAME: MY OWN WAY.

Then Khedrov said — his manner completely changed — "I'm a political officer, and my interests are therefore of a political nature. What I want is political information. Do you understand me?" All of a sudden, I realized that he wanted me to do something for him in return. And I was getting worried. So I asked, "How am I to give you that type of data?"

He answered that this was a minor point, and he'd let me know how, and what, he wanted me to get at a later date. Then he instructed me in a very complicated ritual of making appointments, post-dated according to a special code, gave me a secret phone number to memorize, and a place where I could leave messages for him. Then he drove me to the place where Rakov had picked me up in East Berlin.

DUMPED BY CIA

I was never so glad to get to the Western sector. I called Bennett and told him what had happened. He met me, and told me, "You're getting in too deep. Get out of it now."

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re on your own. Whatever I do from here on will be voluntary. Otherwise, you'd better leave Berlin. We can give you no protection."

Here I was, for the first time in a truly delicate position, and I was thoroughly disgusted, but there was nothing I could do. The choice was either to give my big singing chance in Berlin or to suck it out against odds which were piling up against me.

I decided that I didn't want to be pushed into quitting. Therefore, the only thing I did do was to carry the ball myself. If Bennett wasn't going to help me, and the Russians were breathing down my neck, I would have to go through the motions of playing along with them.

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